



Lewis & Clark Bridge Deck Replacement Project: Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of construction is going to be done?

- The majority of the existing bridge deck is being replaced with new pre-cast concrete panels.
- The existing raised, narrow sidewalks are being removed to provide a wider roadway, while still providing safe pedestrian access.
- Bridge lighting is being added.
- New bridge railings are being installed.
- The bridge is being seismically retrofitted.

Why isn't WSDOT building a new bridge instead?

WSDOT looked into this option in the mid-1990s. We determined that the total cost to build a new bridge would be \$200 million. Even with a one-way toll of \$2-\$2.50 to help pay for the construction, both Washington and Oregon states also would have to provide at least \$50 million each to pay for it. Due to tightening budgets in both states, this kind of money is not currently available.

Repairs to the deck of the existing bridge were urgently needed and had to be made immediately. Replacing the current bridge deck will increase the service life of the bridge for another 25 years, and will cost approximately \$25.4 million, which is being shared equally by both Oregon and Washington.

When will construction end?

The contractor is required to complete the project in fall 2004. However, if the weather doesn't significantly impact the construction schedule, it could be finished sooner.

Why is the bridge being completely closed during construction?

In order to safely remove the old 180,000-pound, 40 to 45 foot sections of the bridge deck and install the new prefabricated panels, the entire length of the bridge from side to side must be completely closed for eight-hour periods of time at night.

Why not just use single lane closures?

When WSDOT designed this project, several options for replacing the deck with different types of traffic impacts were shared with the public. One option had us leaving two nine-foot wide lanes open, while we replaced the deck on the remaining third. The project would have taken **four years** to complete this way, with significant daily traffic delays due to the extremely narrow lanes.

We also looked at closing the entire bridge down for several months in row, which is similar to what the Oregon Department of Transportation did with the St. Johns Bridge in Portland in 2003. Another option completely closed the bridge every weekend for about six months.

However, when we took these options to the public, the majority of people told us they would prefer that we conduct bridge closures the way we are now doing it—with eight-hour full closures at night, when there are less people using the bridge. Only five percent of the total amount of daytime traffic uses the bridge between 9 p.m. and 5:30 a.m. By closing the bridge only at night, we are also able to keep this vital commute and commerce link between Oregon and Washington open to traffic for at least 16 hours out of almost every day, except during a full weekend closure.

Why are the raised sidewalks being removed?

The new bridge deck will provide a level surface roadway consisting of two, 12-foot lanes (one in each direction) with five foot wide shoulders on each side. This will provide the best overall design for the majority of the bridge users because:

- The wider shoulders will allow room for traffic to maneuver around breakdowns and therefore maintain traffic flow.
- The shoulders will allow more space for bicyclists, who currently walk their bicycles across the bridge on narrow 39-inch wide sidewalks.
- Pedestrians will be able to use the wider shoulders to walk across the bridge.

Building a separate pedestrian platform under the existing bridge or out to one side of the bridge deck was not a feasible option because the bridge cannot handle the additional load without extensive structural modifications. This would also potentially add an additional \$6 million to the cost of this project.

Will it be safe for pedestrians and bicyclists to use the new shoulders?

As part of the project, a wide, highly reflective, raised white stripe will mark the shoulders. This stripe makes an audible sound when driven on to alert motorists that they are leaving the driving lane and entering the shoulder. The bridge also will be illuminated at night so motorists can see pedestrians or bicyclists better.

When will the bridge be closed?

Based on public input, the bridge will be open during the day and closed at night. The contractor is allowed 120 nights of full nighttime closures, 120 nights of single lane closures and four full weekend closures. There will be NO closures on major holidays.

Full Nighttime Closures

These closures will usually occur Sunday through Thursday from 9:30 p.m. until 5:30 a.m., with occasional extended closures as needed. The extended closures will be limited to Sunday evenings, when traffic levels on the bridge are lowest, and will start earlier than usual rather than ending later. The contractor has been asked to schedule nighttime closures in set blocks of time, which will help provide greater predictability of the closures and allow the public to make alternate travel plans. The public will receive approximately two weeks advance notice for all full nighttime closures.

Nighttime Single Lane Closures

These closures will usually take place between 9:30 p.m. and 5:30 a.m., with occasional extended closures as needed. The public will receive approximately one week advance notice for single lane closures.

Full Weekend Closures

These closures will start at 11 p.m. on Friday and continue through 5:30 a.m. on Monday. The public will receive at least three weeks advance notice for full weekend closures.

How can I find out when the bridge is closed?

WSDOT is committed to providing the public with accurate, immediate information on the scheduling of the nightly and weekend closures. A variety of communications tools are available to the public for keeping up to date on bridge closures. They are:

- **Changeable electronic messages signs** posted on both sides of the river will advise motorists of the current closure schedule.
- **1-866-427-4630** - This toll-free information telephone line provides regularly updated messages about the status of the project and details about closures. The public also can leave a message or questions for WSDOT on this phone line. It is available in both Oregon and Washington.
- **Two Highway Advisory Radio (HAR) transmitters** with a five-mile broadcast area are constantly broadcasting current closure information using two AM radio frequencies. In the Kelso, Washington area, tune to AM 1580 on your radio dial. In the Rainier, Oregon area, tune to AM 530.

- www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/lewisclarkbridge
The WSDOT Lewis and Clark Bridge Deck Replacement project Web page contains project updates and closure information along with a link to a monthly closure schedule. A link to a **traffic camera** located at the intersection of SR 432 and SR 433 in Longview also is available on the Web page.
- The public and businesses can receive **e-mail or fax** updates on closures and project status. To be added to this distribution list, send a request to: lewisclarkbridge@wsdot.wa.gov
- All local news media receives information from WSDOT regarding closure schedules and project updates via **media alerts and press releases**.

How can I get across the Columbia River when the bridge is closed?

The Puget Island Ferry, located off of State Route 409 (approximately 30 minutes west of the Longview/Rainier area) will run on an expanded 24-hour-a-day schedule during full nighttime and weekend closures of the bridge. The ferry is free of charge during the nighttime closures, and will run every ½ hour or continuously if necessary.

Otherwise, to cross the Columbia River, motorists should use the I-5 Interstate bridge between Portland, OR and Vancouver, WA to the east, or the Astoria-Megler Bridge to the west.

How will emergency medical service be provided during full closures of the bridge?

WSDOT has signed an agreement with Life Flight Network to provide free emergency medical helicopter transportation between Rainier, OR and the hospital in Longview, WA whenever the bridge is completely closed to all traffic. A nurse and a paramedic stationed at the helicopter pad in Rainier, OR, will be able to assess a patient's condition prior to transporting. For more information about the emergency medical helicopter service, please visit the project Web page: www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/lewisclarkbridge